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LETTER DATED 19 APRIL 1996 FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

1. Since hostilities erupted in Liberia on 6 April, the Security Council has been briefed on a daily basis on the main developments, including the widespread looting and complete breakdown of law and order that has engulfed Monrovia. Given the security situation, civilian and military non-essential personnel of the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL), United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have had to be relocated to neighbouring countries. Their offices and equipment have been systematically looted. I should like to express my gratitude to the Government of the United States for the protection it provided to United Nations personnel at its Embassy in Monrovia during the first trying days of the crisis and in relocating United Nations personnel to neighbouring countries.

2. My Special Representative, Mr. Anthony Nyakyi, and some 25 UNOMIL civilian and military personnel, as well as a number of United Nations agency personnel, remain in Liberia to assist in bringing the crisis to a peaceful resolution and to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance, as security conditions permit. My Special Envoy for Liberia, Mr. James Jonah, arrived in Monrovia on 18 April to assist in these efforts and to assess the future of the peace process and the role the United Nations could play in that regard. I will report to the Council on Mr. Jonah's findings and recommendations in due course.

3. The intense fighting witnessed in the first days of the crisis has now died down. Yet, armed fighters, driving vehicles taken from UNOMIL, United Nations agencies and NGOs, continue to roam and loot what is left of the city. Thousands of people have been displaced and are living in desperate conditions. Hundreds of innocent civilians, women and children, remain confined to the Barclay Training Centre, where forces of ULIMO-J, AFL and LPC are concentrated. Food and water are in short supply throughout most of the city and conditions are rife for the spread of endemic disease. While some markets continue to operate, given the extensive looting, it will take some time for the commercial sector to rebuild and for United Nations agencies to become fully operational. Even so, the United Nations humanitarian agencies have cooperated in taking a number of steps to prevent a major humanitarian crisis from developing and to help those who were victimized by the fighting. Emergency food aid has been distributed to many of those in greatest need and steps are being taken to reactivate water and sanitation services.

4. In my report of 1 April 1996 (S/1996/232), I stated that the situation in Liberia was rapidly deteriorating and I expressed my fear that unless the peace process was put back on track very quickly, the consequences could be disastrous. However, I did not expect that the fragile peace in that country would unravel as quickly or as profoundly as it did over the past couple of weeks.

5. I am deeply saddened by the recent events in Liberia, but I am also gratified by the way in which the international community has worked together to promote a peaceful resolution of the crisis. UNOMIL and ECOWAS, with the Ambassadors of Guinea, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and the United States, have undertaken intensive mediation efforts with the Krahn forces on the one hand, and those of Charles Taylor and Alhaji Kromah on the other, to put an end to the fighting and find ways of reactivating the peace process foreseen under the Abuja Agreement of August 1995. These efforts began to bear fruit yesterday, 18 April, when a first meeting was held, under the auspices of UNOMIL, at the United States Embassy with the leaders of the Krahn forces, representing ULIMO-J, LPC, AFL, and the civilians being held at the Barclay Training Centre. I am pleased to report that a number of civilians held at the centre were released today and that more are expected to be released in the coming days.

6. I urge the faction leaders to cooperate fully with the international community in seeking a peaceful resolution to the crisis. Peace will not come to Liberia unless they are willing to work together towards genuine national reconciliation, and respect for the basic human rights of the citizens of their country. They must immediately restore the cease-fire, disengage their forces and return to the Abuja peace process, which offered the Liberian people the hope that peace and stability would finally come to their country.

7. The faction leaders and their fighters must also ensure that the international agencies trying to assist the innocent people of Liberia are allowed to fulfil their respective mandates in conditions of peace and security. The first step, in this regard, should be the immediate return of the vehicles and equipment taken by the factions from UNOMIL, the United Nations agencies and NGOs. The ability of UNOMIL to continue to assist the peace process will depend to a large extent on the fulfilment of these basic conditions.

8. The recent events in Monrovia have dramatically demonstrated that the lack of manpower and logistics from which ECOMOG has chronically suffered has seriously undermined its operational effectiveness. During the recent crisis, ECOMOG had a number of casualties, some of its troops were disarmed and abused by the fighters and a number of its soldiers were taken hostage. ECOMOG has tried to do what it can under extremely difficult circumstances. I, nevertheless, hope that the force will take additional steps to maintain security in Monrovia in order to establish the confidence required for the factions to withdraw from the city and for the displaced people to return to their homes.

9. I should be grateful if you would bring the contents of this letter to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(Signed) Boutros BOUTROS-GHALI